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Sacramento

TO: The Citizens Advisory Council, L.A.F.C.O.
FROM: Committee on Public Attitudes
SUBJECT: Report--Governmental Services: Task and Process
DATE: April 29, 1968

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Three months ago your Council created a Public Attitudes Committee to inquire into the feelings held by residents of this County about their experiences with local government. Your committee has held nine hearings in several areas of the County. At each hearing, it interviewed approximately six residents of the immediate area in which the hearing was held. These residents were invited to appear by the area representatives to the Council and by members of the committee. The residents responded to a series of questions which had been submitted to them in writing prior to their appearance. A copy of the questions sent to them is attached to the Appendix of this report.

The hearings were conducted informally. The chairman opened each hearing with a statement of the scope of the committee's inquiry and an invitation to each resident appearing to be as open and candid with the committee as he chose. Each resident then addressed the committee for approximately twenty minutes. This address was followed by a period of conversation with members of the committee during which points raised in the address were clarified. At the conclusion of each hearing, minutes approximating a verbatim record of the proceedings were published from the stenographer's notes made during the course of the hearing. These published minutes comprise the raw data upon which this report is based. That you may make your own interpretation of the views presented in these hearings and reach your own conclusions concerning the general

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feelings expressed at these meetings the committee has attached ~~a comparative summary of the residents' responses and~~ the complete text of the minutes as an Appendix to this report.

Governmental Services--Task

When your committee began these hearings, it tended to view the task of local government as the efficient provision of such services as sewage treatment and disposal, provision of pure water, street maintenance, fire protection, street lighting, irrigation, recreation and parks, administration of justice and police protection. Your committee discovered that, generally, the residents interviewed are satisfied with the level of services being provided to them by local government. One complaint was received regarding the water pressure in the Orangevale area. Some discussion was had on the wide variation in tax rates among special districts providing the same type of service. Some people felt that the park districts are providing adequate services at present. Others advocated the incorporation of all areas not presently located in a park district into some sort of park district so that no resident would escape paying for the development of parks which he or his neighbors might use. Some desire was expressed for reorganizing and consolidating special districts where this is technically feasible but with the admonition that such consolidation not be undertaken at the expense of "local control."

Governmental Services--Process

As these hearings progressed, your committee discovered that many local residents are concerned more about how government does what it is supposed to do than about what new tasks it may assume. This concern was shown by repeated references in the residents' remarks to the processes



of government and to their feelings concerning the impact of those processes upon their lives. Although general satisfaction was expressed by those testifying about the level of service received from agencies of local government, many residents interviewed expressed decided dissatisfaction with the process by which those services come to them. They seemed to say that, although local government is accomplishing its task to their satisfaction, the way in which it is going about the accomplishment of that task does not leave them feeling very good. Implicit in the testimony of many residents were expectations about local government which seem to have been developed not only out of a desire for good service but also out of a desire for political participation, human involvement, and community. These residents were telling us that their expectations concerning the level of governmental service are being fulfilled but that their expectations about how those services were to be provided and how they would feel about that process of provision are not being fulfilled.

The fact that they do not feel good about the political processes of local government was illustrated by their repeated reference to the high degree of apathy in their communities. They suggested that this apathy is the result rather than the cause of the type of politics that prevails in the County. Some suggested that apathy occurs because there are few opportunities to participate in the political life of the community on a continuing basis. True, the opportunity to vote occurs regularly, but the voting act itself seems meaningless because those running for office either appear to owe their allegiance to other interests in the community or are altogether invisible to the electorate.



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Many associate local government with town meeting democracy. For them, representative government embodied in the Board of Supervisors or the City Councils has removed most of the opportunities for continuing political participation and involvement which they expect from local political life. A paid and professional civil service has removed nearly all of the rest. The few opportunities that remain (for example, membership in volunteer fire departments, water district boards, irrigation district boards, etc.) are clung to with a sort of quiet desperation.

Many residents indicated to us that the governments of various jurisdictions, be they special districts, cities, or the entire county, are not really viable in terms of providing continuing political life on a human scale. The governments of small single-function districts are largely invisible. They lack a recognizable focus of political activity. Information about them is not readily available. Those who participate in them decry the apathy of the newer residents of their areas, but seem at a loss to discover how to provide the interest and involvement which would be necessary to incorporate those newer residents into the political life of the single function district.

The governments of larger districts, such as cities or the county, are visible but inaccessible to many residents. The inaccessibility of public officials in these districts is characterized by the pattern of information flow which prevails in the district. Many residents indicated that it is very difficult to travel from the suburbs to downtown Sacramento in order to obtain a building permit, a license, or public information and that consequently, when the trip must be made, they feel harassed, discomfited, and put out of sorts as a result of their experience with local government. Moreover, some, but not all, of the residents interviewed

have had less than satisfactory experiences with city and county officials once they have managed to reach downtown to transact their public business.

In addition to finding the local administrators inaccessible, many residents have found the Board of Supervisors to be equally remote. Of those responding to the question, "Do you feel that the number of members on the Board of Supervisors should be increased?" all replied in the affirmative. Generally, the residents felt that their Supervisors do not respond to their needs and do not really look to them as an effective part of their basis of political power. For many, the Board of Supervisors simply belongs to someone else. That someone else is usually identified in their minds with a vague and often myth-like entity known as the "downtown interests." Repeated suggestions were made that the Board of Supervisors be enlarged and that Supervisors live in and be elected by the districts which they represent.

When discussing their ties to some sort of community in Sacramento County, few residents spoke in terms of allegiance to any agency of local government, except the schools. Instead, the residents indicated that people in their areas usually take their community identity from an organizational structure in which they can sense a meaningful and prolonged involvement; e.g., a Chamber of Commerce, P.T.A. (school), Rotary, etc. Lacking a viable way of coping with public problems, and thus a political identity, they usually link themselves to the residential location mentioned in the name of the private group affiliation which means the most to them. To be sure, some residents noted that there is an identifiable community which comes to a focus at the schools. But a highly mobile population undermines even this kind of public involvement, thus setting people up for the sort of apathy which results from an absence of meaningful participation in the affairs of a community.

To cope with this felt lack of community, several residents proposed that new governments be created in the unincorporated areas. These governments would be made visible by being endowed with a number of governmental functions having to do primarily with public safety and community aesthetics. They would be made accessible by being associated with pre-existing patterns of human activity such as commerce and residence, and with expressed local needs such as effective policing and enforced community planning.

When referring to proposed annexations, city-county consolidation, or metropolitan government, many residents spoke in terms of "take-over" and "local control." By "take-over" they seemed to mean that a local government situation to which they are able to relate in a meaningful way is about to be restructured so that they can no longer relate to it in a meaningful way. For instance, many residents do not wish to have their volunteer fire departments taken over by professional fire fighters, even though professionalization might be to their economic advantage. They feel that a professional fire department would thenceforth belong to someone else. As a consequence, they will have lost one more relationship to their political community.

The desire for "local control" expressed by many of the residents interviewed seemed to be a desire for a meaningful relationship with local government. We believe that discussing "local control" was their way of telling us that they want to be able to continue to feel good about local government and, thus, to lend it their support and allegiance. In the event that the County adopts patterns of local government to which these residents cannot relate, they believe that they will become increasingly less able to support what is happening to them.

of the city and the unincorporated areas who were
In sum, then, the residents interviewed seemed to feel that govern-
ments in Sacramento County are either too big or too small for people to
relate to in a meaningful way. These residents seemed to expect more
from government than merely an efficient provision of service. They
expected government to provide these services efficiently yet to be
organized on a human scale. Such a scale would render government one
of the focuses of sustained encounter and shared life among residents
which the notion of "community" seems to imply. For many of these
residents this report might be summed up in five words: "Nobody listens;
therefore, nobody cares."

What was encouraging to us was that many of the older residents
still seem willing and able to fight for the sort of local government
which can accomplish its tasks through a process that will take account
of human needs and human feelings. What was discouraging was their
reporting of an increasing number of people in the tracts and new
developments whose willingness to fight has been destroyed; who seem to
be less and less the doers in the world and more and more those to whom
things are done.

Respectfully submitted for the committee,

William A. Dillon, Jr.

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